

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 DAMASC 05404 01 OF 03 150622Z
ACTION SIG-03

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /004 W
-----044821 150642Z /14
R 141520Z SEP 78
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9673

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 DAMASCUS 05404

FI CHANNEL

FOR INSPECTOR GENERAL

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ASIG, SY
SUBJECT: POST INSPECTION MEMORANDUM

REF: STATE 212831

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THE AMERICAN EMBASSY IN SYRIA WAS CLOSED FROM 1967 TO 1974, ALTHOUGH A SMALL STAFF OF LOCAL EMPLOYEES REMAINED TO STAFF A U.S. INTERESTS SECTION IN THE ITALIAN EMBASSY. FIVE AMERICAN PERSONNEL WERE PERMITTED TO RETURN AFTER DR. KISSINGER'S VISIT TO DAMASCUS FOLLOWING THE OCTOBER 1973 WAR. FULL DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WERE RESTORED IN JUNE 1973 DURING PRESIDENT NIXON'S VISIT TO DAMASCUS. THE SUBSEQUENT FOUR YEARS HAVE SEEN STEADY GROWTH IN THE SIZE OF THE MISSION, INCLUDING EXPANDING AID AND ICA PROGRAMS. THE PRIMARY OBJECTIVES OF THE U.S. MISSION IN SYRIA ARE:

- 1. THE EVENTUAL PARTICIPATION OF THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT IN THE PEACE PROCESS.

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PAGE 02 DAMASC 05404 01 OF 03 150622Z

- 2. THE RESTORATION OF PEACE AND SECURITY IN LEBANON, IN WHICH THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT HAS A KEY ROLE TO PLAY, PERMITTING THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT TO RE-ESTABLISH ITS AUTHORITY AND SYRIAN TROOPS TO WITHDRAW FROM LEBANON.
- 3. WEANING OF THE SYRIAN REGIME AWAY FROM ALIGNMENT WITH THE SOVIETS IN THE DIRECTION OF CLOSER TIES WITH THE WEST.

4. STRENGTHENING OF BILATERAL RELATIONS WITH SYRIA.

PROJECTS WHICH PROMOTE OBJECTIVES 3 AND 4 ABOVE INCLUDE A SUBSTANTIAL AID PROGRAM, INCLUDING A HIGH TECHNOLOGY INPUT; PROMOTION OF U.S.-SYRIAN TRADE; AND INTENSIFICATION OF CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL TIES.

U.S. RELATIONS WITH SYRIA HAVE BECOME SUBJECT TO CONSIDERABLE STRAIN IN THE PAST NINE MONTHS, BEGINNING WITH U.S. SUPPORT FOR THE SADAT INITIATIVE. THIS HAS BEEN INTENSIFIED IN THE LAST TWO MONTHS BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES' VOTE TO CUT OFF SECURITY SUPPORT ASSISTANCE TO SYRIA AND BY AN AS YET UNOFFICIAL BUT GROWING MUTUAL DISTRUST OVER OUR RESPECTIVE INTENTIONS IN LEBANON.

- ISSUES AND PROBLEMS FOR THE INSPECTORS' ATTENTION

1A. POLICY FORMULATION

THE MISSION HAS NO SIGNIFICANT SUBSTANTIVE DIFFERENCES OF VIEW WITH WASHINGTON. AN ISSUE OF CONSIDERABLE DEBATE, CHIEFLY AMONG BEIRUT, DAMASCUS, AND TEL AVIV IS THE DIFFICULT PROBLEM OF DISCERNING SYRIAN INTENTIONS IN LEBANON.

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PAGE 03 DAMASC 05404 01 OF 03 150622Z

1B. MULTILATERAL DIPLOMACY

ALTHOUGH SYRIA GENERALLY FOLLOWS THE NAM POSITION (GENERALLY TOWARD THE LESS FAVORABLE END OF THE SPECTRUM), THE MISSION HAS MADE MODERATE PROGRESS IN STIMULATING A DIALOGUE ON MULTILATERAL ISSUES. THE FOREIGN MINISTRY IS WILLING TO EXAMINE OUR ARGUMENTS CAREFULLY AND SOMETIMES RESPONDS FAVORABLY.

2. MISSION MANAGEMENT

THE MISSION IS HAMPERED IN DEALING WITH CRITICAL DEVELOPMENTS CONCERNING THE ARAB-ISRAEL AND LEBANON PROBLEMS BY ITS RELATIVE LACK OF ACCESS TO THE SYRIAN GOVERNMENT (IN CONTRAST TO EMBASSIES CAIRO, TEL AVIV, BEIRUT, AMMAN, AND JIDDA) AND BY SYRIAN UNRESPONSIVENESS TO OUR REPRESENTATIONS. GOOD CHANNELS DO EXIST THROUGH THE PRESIDENT'S ADVISOR AND THE FOREIGN MINISTER BUT THESE CANNOT BE USED WITH HIGH FREQUENCY OR ON LESS THAN HIGHLY URGENT MATTERS. ALTHOUGH MANY WORKING LEVEL CONTACTS ARE ACCESSIBLE AND RESPONSIVE, THE MISSION FREQUENTLY MUST

DEAL WITH OFFICIALS WHO ARE IDEOLOGICALLY UNSYMPATHETIC. THIS IS PARTICULARLY TRUE IN THE AID PROGRAM, ALTHOUGH CONSIDERABLE PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE SINCE THIS PROGRAM WAS STARTED IN 1975.

3. POLITICAL

SYRIA'S ROLE IN LEBANON, ITS POSITION AMONG THE CONFRONTA-

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 05404 02 OF 03 150751Z
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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /004 W
-----047364 150812Z /12

R 141520Z SEP 78
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9674

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 03 DAMASCUS 05404

FI CHANNEL

FOR INSPECTOR GENERAL

TION STATES, AND THE CLOSED NATURE OF ITS DECISION MAKING PROCESS CREATE A HEAVY BURDEN ON THE POLITICAL SECTION FOR POLITICAL ANALYSIS AND REPORTING. ACCESS TO SENIOR MILITARY AND PARTY OFFICIALS IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE, EVEN FOR THE AMBASSADOR, IN MARKED CONTRAST TO THE ACCESSIBILITY AT OTHER KEY MIDDLE EAST POSTS. GIVEN THE SITUATION IN THE AREA, THE POLITICAL OFFICER MUST GIVE PRECEDENCE TO THE DEPARTMENT'S NEEDS FOR SHORT-TERM POLICY-RELATED ANALYSIS AT THE EXPENSE OF LESS IMMEDIATE CONCERNS SUCH AS LABOR AND BIOGRAPHIC REPORTING OR BROADER STUDIES OF SYRIAN SOCIETY. WITH THE UNEXPECTED LOSS OF ONE POLITICAL OFFICER IN AUGUST AND SIMULTANEOUS RESIGNATION OF A LOCAL POLITICAL ASSISTANT, THE SECTION IS SEVERELY STRAINED TO MEET ALL REQUIREMENTS LEVIED ON IT. WE ARE SEEKING DEPARTMENT EXCEPTION TO HIRING RESTRICTIONS TO FILL THE LOCAL POSITION AND WE MAY GET A TDY OFFICER TO FILL AT LEAST SIX MONTHS OF THE GAP FROM NOW UNTIL NEXT JUNE BEFORE A NEW PERMANENT REPLACEMENT FOR THE SECOND POLITICAL OFFICER CAN BE ASSIGNED. IN THE INTERIM THE POLITICAL SECTION SECRETARY IS ASSUMING MUCH OF THE BURDEN FOR PROGRAM ADMINISTRATION SUCH AS CONTROLLING THE LANGUAGE

PROGRAM AND POST LIBRARY. SINCE THESE PROGRAMS ARE
LIKELY TO REMAIN AMONG THE SECRETARY'S ALREADY HEAVE RE-
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PAGE 02 DAMASC 05404 02 OF 03 150751Z

SPONSIBILITIES, THAT POSITION APPEARS TO BE UNDER-GRADED
FOR THE DUTIES PERFORMED.

4. ECONOMIC

THE ECONOMIC/COMMERCIAL SECTION, WORKING CLOSELY WITH AID,
SEEKS THE INTRODUCTION INTO SYRIA OF HIGH-LEVEL U.S.
TECHNOLOGY AS THE BEST WAY TO INCREASE AMERICAN EXPORTS
AND TO MAKE CLEAR BY EXAMPLE THE DAMAGE SUFFERED BY THE
SYRIAN ECONOMY IN A DECADE OF ALMOST EXCLUSIVE RELIANCE
ON COMMUNIST COUNTRIES. HOWEVER, PROSPECTS FOR MEASURABLY
IMPROVING U.S. EXPORTS ARE NOT ENCOURAGING, DESPITE USAID
AND EMBASSY SUCCESS IN OVERCOMING PSYCHOLOGICAL OBJEC-
TIONS TO DEALING WITH THE UNITED STATES. ON THE SYRIAN
SIDE, ADMINISTRATIVE, BUREAUCRATIC, AND REGULATORY
OBSTACLES STILL POSE A SERIOUS DISINCENTIVE TO AMERICAN
BUSINESSMEN. (A RECENT CAPRICIOUS REGULATORY CHANGE MAY
IMPERIL U.S. PARTICIPATION IN OUR MAJOR TRADE EVENT: THE
DAMASCUS INTERNATIONAL FAIR.) ON THE U.S. SIDE,
OBSTACLES INCLUDE THE LACK OF BUSINESS INTEREST IN THE
SMALL SYRIAN MARKET, OPIC'S INABILITY TO RESPOND QUICKLY
AND ITS HIGH COST, THE EX-IM BANK'S UNWILLINGNESS UNTIL
SIX MONTHS AGO TO DEAL IN SYRIA, COMMERCE'S LOW PRIORITY
FOR SYRIA RELATIVE TO THE BETTER DEVELOPED ARABIAN
PENINSULA MARKETS, AND THE COMPLICATIONS OF CONFLICTING
U.S.-SYRIAN BOYCOTT REGULATIONS. THE ECONOMIC/COMMERCIAL
SECTION IS NOW WELL HOUSED AND STAFFED. THE ADDITION OF
A NEW OFFICER IN SEPTEMBER WILL ENABLE IT TO CONCENTRATE
MORE ON ECONOMIC REPORTING.

5. CONSULAR

SINCE THE LAST INSPECTION, THE CONSULAR SECTION HAS RE-
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PAGE 03 DAMASC 05404 02 OF 03 150751Z

LOCATED TO A NEW AREA WHERE SPACE AND FACILITIES ARE
TOTALLY SATISFACTORY. THE CURRENT LEBANESE PROBLEM HAS
INCREASED THE VISA WORKLOAD SOME TEN PERCENT; HOWEVER, IF
THE SITUATION DOES NOT DETERIORATE FURTHER IN LEBANON,
THE SECTION ENVISIONS NO DIFFICULTY IN ITS ABILITY TO
MEET THE CURRENT INCREASE DEMAND FOR SERVICES. IN OUR
1978-1979 CONSULAR PACKAGE WE REQUESTED THE ESTABLISHMENT

OF AN ADDITIONAL FSL POSITION, FOR WHICH WE ARE AWAITING
AUTHORIZATION TO HIRE.

6. JOINT ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE

THE MISSION, WHICH REOPENED IN 1974 WITH FIVE PERSONS,
HAS GROWN RAPIDLY TO AN AUTHORIZED COMPLEMENT OF 57
AMERICANS, 91 FSLs, AND 10 MARINES, WITH CONTINUED GROWTH
ANTICIPATED OVER THE NEXT TWO YEARS, PARTICULARLY IN AID.
VIRTUALLY ALL SUPPORT IS PROVIDED BY THE JAO. THIS
GROWTH HAS CREATED A NUMBER OF ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEMS.
SOME OF THE MORE SIGNIFICANT ARE SUMMARIZED BELOW:

- A. SYRIAN GOVERNMENT RESTRICTIONS: LIMITATIONS
AND OFFICIAL VEHICLES REMAIN AT 23 AND 17, RESPECTIVELY.
A REQUEST TO INCREASE THE NUMBER OF OFFICIAL VEHICLES
WAS MADE MORE THAN SIX MONTHS AGO AND IS STILL AWAITING
A DECISION. A 44 PERCENT TAX ON INCOME DERIVED FROM
RENTALS TO NON-SYRIANS CONTINUES TO MAKE HOUSING EXPEN-
SIVE, BUT THE SHORTAGE OF ADEQUATE HOUSING HAS ABATED.
AID IS STILL OPERATING UNDER AN INADEQUATE BILATERAL

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 05404 03 OF 03 150705Z
ACTION SIG-03

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 /004 W
-----046022 150718Z /14

R 141520Z SEP 78
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 03 OF 03 DAMASCUS 05404

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FOR INSPECTOR GENERAL

AGREEMENT SIGNED IN CAIRO DURING THE 1958-1961 UNION OF
EGYPT AND SYRIA. WHILE MOST PROBLEMS WITH REGARD TO
IMPORTATION OF HOUSEHOLD EFFECTS, ETC., HAVE BEEN RE-
SOLVED, VEHICLE REGISTRATION PROCEDURES FOR AID EMPLOYEES
DO CREATE DIFFICULTIES FOR THE INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYEES.
NUMEROUS RESTRICTIONS ALSO APPLY TO THE SALE OF NON-
EXPENDABLE PROPERTY.

- B. OFFICE SPACE: IN ADDITION TO THE GOVERNMENT-OWNED CHANCERY COMPLEX, OFFICES OCCUPY FIVE SHORT-TERM LEASED APARTMENTS PLUS ONE SHORT-TERM LEASED BUILDING. STORAGE SPACE CONSISTS OF ONE SMALL WAREHOUSE RECENTLY BUILT ON THE CHANCERY GROUNDS AND TWO RESIDENTIAL APARTMENTS UNDER SHORT-TERM LEASES. WITH ANTICIPATED FURTHER GROWTH, THE NEED FOR ANOTHER LEASED OFFICE LOCATION AND MORE STORAGE SPACE SEEMS QUITE PROBABLE.

- C. PERSONNEL: THE MISSION HAS REQUESTED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN AMERICAN DAS PERSONNEL OFFICER POSITION AND THREE DAS FSL POSITIONS IN GSO. THE GROWTH OF THE MISSION STAFF HAS MADE IT IMPOSSIBLE TO PROVIDE THE NECESSARY SUPPORT WITH A GSO STAFF GEARED TO THE 1976 STAFFING LEVEL. THE JOINT ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE IS ALSO CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 DAMASC 05404 03 OF 03 150705Z

UNABLE TO PROVIDE ADEQUATE PERSONNEL SERVICES TO OTHER AGENCIES.

- D. NEW CHANCERY (GARDEN SITE): THE POST HAS BEEN WORKING WITH A/FBO ON PLANS FOR A NEW CHANCERY ON THE PRESENT SCHOOL SITE. CURRENT THINKING IS TO CO-LOCATE THE SCHOOL AND THE CHANCERY ON THE SAME LOT. WE HOPE THAT ARCHITECTURAL AND ENGINEERING WORK WILL BEGIN IN FY 1979.

CLEARLY SOME PROVISION MUST BE MADE TO RETAIN THE SCHOOL IN ITS PRESENT FORM OR AS CLOSE TO IT AS POSSIBLE. IN ADDITION TO PROVIDING EDUCATIONAL TRAINING FOR DEPENDENTS, THE SCHOOL FACILITY PROVIDES MUCH NEEDED RECREATIONAL FACILITIES FOR THE ENTIRE AMERICAN COMMUNITY. THIS PIECE OF LAND ALSO CURRENTLY HAS TWO RECENTLY BUILT EMBASSY TENNIS COURTS WHICH SHOULD BE RETAINED. THE POST BELIEVES THAT IF POSSIBLE A SWIMMING POOL SHOULD BE CONSTRUCTED AS PART OF THE BUILDING PROGRAM PERHAPS ADJACENT TO THE TENNIS COURTS TO FORM A MUCH NEEDED RECREATIONAL FACILITY. DAMASCUS IS GENERALLY LACKING IN RECREATIONAL FACILITIES, AND THE LOSS OF ANY EXISTING FACILITIES WOULD BE A SEVERE BLOW TO MORALE.

7. CULTURAL AND INFORMATION ACTIVITIES

THE NATURE OF ACTIVITIES REQUESTED BY THE SARG UNDER THE BILATERAL CULTURAL AGREEMENT REQUIRES THAT WE WORK WITHIN SPECIFIC AREAS. WE, NONETHELESS, ATTEMPT TO ORIENT OUR CULTURAL/INFORMATIONAL ACTIVITIES TOWARD POLICY-RELATED AREAS. SIMILARLY, WE ARE SEVERELY LIMITED IN OUR ABILITY TO PLACE MATERIAL OF A MORE POLITICAL NATURE IN THE TIGHTLY CONTROLLED MEDIA, ALTHOUGH WE CAN SEND ARABIC MATERIAL DIRECTLY TO KEY FIGURES. THE QUANTUM LEAP IN CULTURAL/INFORMATIONAL EXCHANGE ENVISIONED UNDER THE CULTURAL

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PAGE 03 DAMASC 05404 03 OF 03 150705Z

AGREEMENT AND THE ORGANIZING OF CULTURAL CENTER OPERATIONS ON A MORE REGULAR, NON-CRISIS BASIS, WILL STRAIN AN AL-READY THINLY STRETCHED ICA SECTION. (THE NUMBER OF INTERNATIONAL VISITOR GRANTS, FOR EXAMPLE, IS GROWING RAPIDLY.

8. DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE

THE PROBLEMS OF A THREATENED CONGRESSIONAL CUTOFF AND LOCAL WORKING RELATIONS HAVE BEEN NOTED. CUMBERSOME U.S. AND SYRIAN ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES, ALTHOUGH IMPROVING, HAVE ALSO CREATED A CONSIDERABLE PIPELINE OF ABOUT \$300 MILLION IN PROJECTS NOT YET IMPLEMENTED, A PROBLEM WHICH HAS DRAWN CRITICAL CONGRESSIONAL COMMENT.

9. NOTES ON PERSONNEL ABSENCES AND OTHER EVENTS DURING INSPECTION

- A. DATT COL. ASHBY AND POLOFF RAUH WILL BE ABSENT DURING INSPECTION.
- B. CODEL (SCHEUER, CONTE, ERLNBORN AND KILDEE) WILL BE HERE OCTOBER 11-13.
- C. GAO STUDYING AID SECURITY SUPPORT ASSISTANCE WILL BE HERE OCTOBER 12-27. SEELYE

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: FI
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: n/a
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 14 sep 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978DAMASC05404
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780375-0538
Format: TEL
From: DAMASCUS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780968/aaaacdxcv.tel
Line Count: 361
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 3b6cb350-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION SIG
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 7
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 78 STATE 212831
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 30 jun 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1437854
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: POST INSPECTION MEMORANDUM
TAGS: ASIG, SY
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odhc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/3b6cb350-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014